

Tess - A Pure Woman or A Fallen Woman? The Portrayal of Gender Issues in Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A Feminist Approach

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Abstract

This article aims at examining women's social position in Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. A special emphasis has been given to the portrayal of Tess, her seduction and the aftermath of her rape. The narrator also describes the male-female relations in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. The exploration of gender issues in the novel has put forth the discussion in terms of patriarchy. Although the first reading of the novel produces a negative picture of Tess, a close reading unfolds Hardy's artistic mastery over picking up the total screening of the Victorian age. The discussion why Tess did not protest to Alec's seduction is not the case; rather Tess reflects on how women are unheard and justified for her being a woman. Her situation also reflects on how she becomes cheap to a society when she is seduced. Tess, a pure woman, becomes a fallen woman. Literally, the novel becomes a social narrative that marks an unjust gap between the male and the female in the Victorian society.

Keywords: Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Pure Woman, Gender, Patriarchy, Seduction, Tragedy

1. Introduction

Thomas Hardy was born in 1840 in the small village in Dorset, an area of southern England steeped in history. One of the local landmarks, Corfe Castle, was once home for the kings of the ancient Saxon kingdom of Wessex. Hardy chose the name Wessex for the setting of his most important novels, including *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Like the Durbeyfields in *Tess*, the Hardys fancy themselves descendants of a noble and ancient family line. The Dorset Hardys were presumably a branch of the Le Hardys, who claimed descent from Clement Le Hardy, a fifteen-century lieutenant-governor of the British Channel Island of Jersey. Remote ties to Vice-Admiral Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy, who served with the British naval hero Nelson during the decisive battle of Trafalgar in 1805, were also possible.

Tess of the D'Urbervilles is generally regarded as Hardy's finest novel which is written in 1891. As a brilliant tale of seduction, love, betrayal, and murder, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* yields to narrative convention by punishing Tess's sin, but courageously exposes the final result of unforgiving morality as cruelly unjust. After the first reading, one's reaction to the theme can be really negative regarding Tess' purity. W.J. Keith says that "[A]s everyone knows, this novel stirred up a furious controversy" (Keith 83). Throughout, Hardy's most lyrical, and atmospheric language frames his shattering narrative. He is well-versed, and informed about his time, and cultural phenomena. His intense knowledge about what was really happening at that time makes him a spokesman in his time. He severely criticizes his contemporary elites, who he finds have the lack of proper social, political, religious, and cultural sentiment. In fact, Hardy is the representative of the Victorian era. In "*Hardy and Critical Theory*", Peter Widdowson writes that Hardy was:

a widely read intellectual closely familiar with the literary debates of the second half of the nineteenth century. For the purposes of the present essay, we may deduce one – albeit crucial – feature of Hardy's involvement in these: one which casts him as ineluctably "transitional" between "Victorian" and "Modern" and which suggests the affinity between his work and late-twentieth-century critical approaches. If we read between the lines of the three fiction essays – verified by jottings in his notebooks and by memoranda quoted in *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy* – it is apparent that Hardy is actually participating in the pan-European debate about Realism, and that he was opposed to a "photographic" naturalism, favoring instead a kind of "analytic" writing which "makes strange" common-sense reality and brings into view other realities obscured precisely by the naturalized version (Widdowson 74).

The novel centers around a young woman, who struggles to find her place in society. When it is discovered that lower-class Durbeyfield family is in reality the D'Urbervilles, the last of a famous bloodline that dates back hundreds of years, the mother sends her eldest daughter, Tess, to beg money from relations with the obvious desire that Tess wed the rich Mr. D'Urbervilles. Thus begins a tale of woe in which a wealthy man cruelly abuses a poor girl. Tess has taken advantage of by Mr. D'Urbervilles, and leaves his house, returning home to have their child, who subsequently dies. Throughout the rest of this fascinating novel, Tess is tormented by guilt at the thought of her impurity, and vows to never marry. She is tested when she meets Angel, the clever son of a priest, and falls in love with him. After days of pleading, Tess gives in to Angel, and agrees to marry him. Angel deserts Tess when he finds the innocent country girl he once fell in love with is not so pure.

2. The Social Status of Tess: A Commentary

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* begins with a seemingly insignificant incident: John Durbeyfield, a middle-aged peddler, is informed during a chance encounter on his way home one May evening that he is the descendent of an "ancient and knightly family," called the D'Urbervilles. On learning this "useless piece of information," "Sir John" has a horse, and carriage fetched for him so that he can arrive home in a manner more befitting his new station, and then goes out drinking, getting drunk enough that he is unable to get up in the middle of the night to make a delivery to a nearby town for the following morning. Tess, his oldest daughter, accompanied by her young brother Abraham, attempts to make the delivery instead; but she falls asleep on the way, and the family's horse, unguided, gets into a strange accident and dies on the road.

Hardy's heroine is the daughter of John, and Joan Durbeyfield of Marlott in Wessex, the eldest of seven children. The subtitle to the novel, "A Pure Woman" emphasizes her purity, but critics debate whether a woman who is seduced by one man, marries another one who abandons her, and then kills the first, could be considered "pure." But, purity aside, she is, with rare exception, praised by critics, who admire her steadfast hope under adversity. While she is unimpressed with the news that she has noble ancestors, she feels so much guilt when she unwittingly causes the death of the family horse, that she follows her parents' wish that she "claim kin" at the nearby D'Urbervilles estate. Her mother's longing that Tess can marry with the rich, Mr. D'Urbervilles. Then she can save them from poverty.

The Victorian age takes its name from Queen Victoria who ruled from 1837 to 1901; it was a complex era characterized by stability, progress and social reforms, and, in the mean time, by great problems such as poverty, injustice and social unrest; that's why the Victorians felt obliged to promote, and invent a rigid code of values that reflected the world as they wanted it to be, based on: duty, and hard work; respectability: a mixture of both morality and hypocrisy, severity and conformity to social standards (possessions of good manners, ownership of a comfortable house, regular attendance at church and charitable activity); it distinguished the middle from the lower classes; Charity, and philanthropy: an activity that involved many people, especially women. The family was strictly patriarchal: the husband represented the authority, and respectability, consequently a single woman with a child was amalgamated because of a widespread sense of female chastity. Sexuality was generally repressed, and that led to extreme manifestations of prudery.

There are several factors that contributed to women during the Victorian age to marry. Many of these results were a result of lack of choice. Women were left uneducated in many areas of life. They had no control over their education, and were taught about domestic duties only. Starting at a young age, they were taught that a woman should get married, and have children. They were born, raised and educated to become wives, and nothing else. They often spent their time with time consuming devices to hide the fact that she had a lot of free time on her hands. A woman was not expected to work unless she was in the lower class, and had no choice, and therefore often had plenty of time to look pretty. Women who were not in the work force were therefore seen as a higher class than working class women. As a result of lack of education, women were expected to marry in order to find someone to support them since they did not have the knowledge to do many jobs. This leads the reader into the social and financial pressures that resulted in women getting married. Women were often married because girls' parents would often search for a man who would be wealthy, have a title and could advance their social status (Vicinus 72).

Tess is shown as a hard worker, working in the fields after her baby is born, working at the dairy, and, later, working in the rutabaga fields at Flintcomb-Ash. But for all her strength, she is like a trapped bird. In her simplicity, she tries to do what is right, but her well-meaning actions often are futile. Her effort to help her family by going to the D'Urbervilles estate ends with her seduction; when she tries to tell Angel about what happened between her and Alec, she is unable to until after the wedding. When Alec keeps pursuing her, she tells him, "Whip me, crush me.... I shall not cry out. Once victim, always victim—that's the law." (309) Later, she murders Alec in desperation, knowing that if he had only gone away when she told him to, she could have been happy with Angel. Before she is taken away by the police, she asks Angel to marry her sister, 'Liza Lu. As the book ends, she is hanged for Alec's murder.

Angel is the youngest son of Rev. James Clare, and his wife. He appears in the opening chapters of the book as a young man with upper-class bearings that dances with Tess's friends as they celebrate their May festival. He demonstrates immediately the differences between him, and his brothers; while they hurry home to their studies, he stops to dance. The two meet again at Talbothays Dairy, where Angel is in apprenticeship for being a gentleman farmer. Although his father, and his two older brothers are members of the clergy, Angel wants no part of their orthodox Christianity. To Tess, he is "educated, reserved, subtle, sad, [and] differing" (145). He idealizes Tess as a "fresh, virginal daughter of nature" (145) and asks her to marry him. When she hesitates, he asks again and again, and when she postpones a wedding date, he insists. Three of the other milkmaids at the farm worship Angel from afar and despair at the thought that Angel will never be theirs. Although he defends his choice of her for a wife before his parents, he seems not really to accept her as she is, and is secretly elated when she tells him she is of the D'Urbervilles family.

His true feelings are revealed when, after their marriage, he confesses to “eight-and-forty hours’ dissipation with a stranger” (230) which Tess immediately forgives. He, however, is unable to forgive Tess when she confesses what had happened with Alec. He gives her some money, but leaves her to seek his fortune in Brazil. His total lack of concern for Tess is seen when he happens to meet one of the milkmaids from the farm, Izz Huett, and asks her to go with him to Brazil. He changes his mind, however, when she tells him no one could love him as much as Tess. When he returns to England from Brazil, he is finally able to accept her as his wife. The two enjoy a few days of happiness together before Tess is captured. After her death, he follows her wishes, and marries her sister.

Alexander Stoke-D’Urbervilles in his early twenties when he first appears in the novel, Alec is the son of the late Mr. Simon Stoke, who added “D’Urbervilles” to his name to conceal his real identity when the family moved from southern England. He seems immediately taken with his pretty “Coz” (63) when she comes to the estate to “claim kin”, and after she leaves, he sends a letter purported to be from his invalid mother to Tess’s mother asking that Tess comes to work for her. Tess tries to avoid him, but one night he follows her when she goes to a fair, and market at a neighboring town. He cajoles her into accepting his offer of a ride in his buggy, because she fears to be out so late by herself. Taking advantage of the lateness of the hour, and her fatigued condition, Alec seduces her. The next time he appears in the novel, he is a preacher, converted by Angel’s father. When he and Tess accidentally meet, Alec’s softer side is revealed as he seems to be particularly touched when Tess tells him for the first time of their child.

Alec becomes once again obsessed with her and pursues Tess to Flintcomb-Ash, where she reveals to him that she is married. She refuses to have anything to do with him, but when she sees him again, he no longer wears his parson’s frock. Instead, he is described as a villain from a melodrama, twirling a “gay walking cane.” He belittles Tess for being faithful to her absent husband. Infuriated, she hits him in the face with a leather glove. Although they part, when she returns to Marlott to care for her ailing mother Alec pursues her again. As she works in the family garden, in the light of fires of burning weeds, he appears as a devil with a pitchfork in hand and says to her, “You are Eve, and I am the old Other One come up to tempt you in the disguise of an inferior animal” (340). His constant reproaching her for believing in Angel, his bestowal of gifts upon her family, and the family’s desperate situation when Tess’s father dies, and the family is forced to leave their home, all contribute to Tess’s final agreement to live with him as his wife. The pair goes to Sandbourne, a fashionable resort area, where Tess finally kills him by stabbing him with a knife.

Going to the heart of Hardy’s story, for what happens in the ancient wood called the Chase that fateful night alters the course not only of Tess’s future husband, Angel Clare. Critics describe the encounter as rape or seduction or both, sometimes, fluctuating between the two in the same article, and even in the same sentence. Some have concluded that the issue may not be solved, because they believe Hardy made it deliberately ambiguous. After a dance one night in a nearby market town, a jealous former favorite of Alec’s picks a quarrel with Tess. Like a knight of old, young D’Urbervilles grabs onto the scene to rescue her on horseback. He has already extended help to her family, and has been persistently trying for several months to win her affections, but she has not really requited. He is determined, however, and to lengthen their time together on this beautiful night he rides to the Chase. Tess is bothered by the indirect way and demands that they stop. While the truly lost Alec gets his bearings, an exhausted Tess lies down and falls asleep. He comes upon her again as he gropes through the blackness, and soon Tess is “maiden no more.” (95) The seduction of Tess can be best described in the following words of Hardy:

“There was no answer. The obscurity was now so great that he could see absolutely nothing but a pale nebulousness at his feet, which represented the white muslin figure he had left upon the dead leaves. Everything else was blackness alike. D’Urbervilles stooped; and heard a gentle regular breathing. He knelt and bent lower, till her breath warmed his face, and in a moment his cheek was in contact with hers. She was sleeping soundly, and upon her eyelashes there lingered tears.” (106)

“Darkness and silence ruled everywhere around. Above them rose the primeval yews and oaks of The Chase, in which were poised gentle roosting birds in their last nap; and about them stole the hopping rabbits and hares. But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awake.” (94)

The narrator relates the scene only indirectly, and gives no specificity, but indulges instead in broad philosophical speculation on the unexpected changes of fortune and the absence of Tess’s guardian angel, and the weight of her Norman past. Hardy’s own explanation of the situation in a letter to a correspondent was that it is “a seduction, pure and simple,” but that has not satisfied critics and readers, perhaps because he covers the event with so many comments throughout the story as to give rise to different impressions in different places. What most definitively demonstrates that it is not rape, again indirectly, that Tess continues on at Trantridge for a few weeks afterward as D’Urbervilles mistress, and accepts some gifts of “finery” from him. Granted, she is not fully comfortable with this arrangement, for she is truly the “pure woman” of Hardy’s subtitle (“a pure

woman faithfully presented”), or at least she is what Hardy means of a pure woman—a woman, who does not use sex, and who, knows instinctively that it is wrong without love—in contrast to the more literal definition of female purity fiercely held by his society. This kind of awareness may also explain why Tess doesn’t even think of cheating Alec into marriage, as her mother was hoping. (At the same time, confusion over what the novel means by “pure” is also the reason some readers believe the act has to be raped.) Be that as it may, it’s hard to imagine a young woman voluntarily remaining with a man in this fashion if she had truly been assaulted by him against her will. Then Tess should not stay at Trantridge for several weeks after the incident.

Other details that support seduction come from Tess herself. As Alec drives her back to her village, she is as hard on herself as she is reproachful of him. She “loathe[s] and hate[s]” herself for her “weakness” (97), and laments that her “eyes were dazed by you for a little” (97). Once back home, she reflects how she was “stirred to confused surrender” because of “his ardent manners” despite not loving him. (Catharine Mackinnon 1982, cited in Ellen Rooney 450) “Ellen Rooney summarizes Catherine A. MacKinnon’s argument that, although society distinguishes between rape, and seduction the distinction is not as clear as the law makes it appear to be; sometimes, perhaps often, a woman honestly *feels* she has been raped by a man who honestly *feels* that his sexual partner consented to intercourse.” (Rooney 455).

Ellen Rooney presents us with a feminist perspective which addresses a few key conflicts in the story, offering qualification if not answers. Essentially, Rooney argues that: Hardy is unable to represent the meaning of the encounter in *The Chase* from Tess’s point of view because of present Tess as a speaking subject is to risk the possibility that she may appear as the subject of desire. Yet a figure with no potential as a desiring subject can only formally be said to refuse desire...Hardy is blocked in both directions (Rooney 466). According to Rooney, we do not hear from Tess in this instance, for if we were to, it would only reinforce the notion of “Tess the seductress.” Yet, in various versions, Tess is presented as a seductress. Even by her nature as a beautiful woman, Hardy presents the reader mixed messages; we should see her as a willing seductress, or as a victim who must suffer because of her body’s effects on others.

Rooney argues that Hardy never comes to a conclusion on this issue, but “enables Tess to give over [her body], utterly silenced and purified, not by Hardy’s failure to see that she might speak, but by his unflinching description of the inexorable forces that produce her as the seductive object of the discourses of man” (Rooney 481). Rooney writes a capable piece of gender criticism, in that it is defined as “how women have been written.” Gender issues seem to permeate the story and the author doesn’t take a definitive stand on them. Rooney attempts to examine what role Tess plays in the story, how her interactions with Alec and Angel Clare form her identity, and how she triumphs over her afflictions. Ironically, her biggest affliction is her natural beauty; it’s something men simply cannot pass up, and just by her looks, she becomes seductive. Rooney brings this point up, but much to her credit, does not unleash an attack on Hardy or men because of it. Often feminist critics bear the burden that they are out to “get” men, yet when there is an apt argument for doing so in *Tess*; Rooney refrains, and simply addresses the issues. Overall, her article was quite helpful in addressing the most resonant conflict in the whole story. Hardy doesn’t give us a reason, nor does he give us even the actual event at *The Chase*. The reader is left to deduce from the rest of the text whether or not it was rape that took place, and Hardy gives us mixed messages (Rooney 479).

This remains a gray area because Hardy delicately draws a veil over it, and does not describe the rape/seduction. One reason, of course, is that in a nineteenth century novel, it would not be possible to provide a graphic description. Hardy wants to preserve the modesty of his “pure” heroine. She is ill-used by the world, and lovingly, achingly evoked as desirable, and vulnerable - much like Wessex. It is demonstrated that Tess was not raped. In the following chapter she said, “If I had gone for love o’ you, if I had ever sincerely loved you, if I loved you still, I should not so loathe and hate myself for my weakness as I do now!... My eyes were dazed by you for a little, and that was all.”(97) She stayed with him for a few weeks afterwards, and was “dazed” by him. She was not raped because she didn’t try to stop him. Thomas Hardy suggests by that statement, it may have happened more than once. In other scene Angel Clare Tess’s husband says something to the effect of: “You let yourself be seduced by him” (243) when he finds out that Tess is not in fact “pure.” It shows how rape was regarded then, and how it continues to be seen by some nowadays: as the woman’s fault (Mackinnon 43).

“In defense of Tess [women] are brought up from their earliest years in the belief that the ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will and self-government by self- control, but submission, and yielding to that control of others.” (John Stuart Mill, quoted in Sarah E. Maier 22)

In the novel, Hardy considers both the “Rights of Man” and, with equal sympathy, the rights of women. Women of the Victorian era were idealized as the helpmate of man, the keeper of the home, and the “weaker sex”. Heroines in popular fiction were expected to be frail, and virtuous. The thought that Hardy subtitled his novel “A Pure Woman” infuriated some Victorian critics, because it flew in the face of all they held sacred. For, while the Victorian era was a time of national pride, and belief in British superiority, it was also an age best-remembered for its emphasis on a strict code of morality, unequally applied to men and women. The term Victorian has come to refer to any person or group with a narrow, uncompromising sense of right and wrong.

Women were not only discriminated against by the moral code, but they were also discriminated against by the legal code of the day.

Until the 1880s married women were unable to hold property in their own name; and the wages of rural workers would go directly to the husband, even if he failed to provide anything for his family. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 granted the right to a divorce to both men, and women on the basis of adultery, but in order to divorce her husband, a woman would have to further prove gross cruelty or desertion. Women who sought divorce for whatever reason were ostracized from polite society. Women, like children, were best “seen, but not heard,” or as Seymour-Smith observes, “The Victorian middle-class wife ... was admired upon her pedestal of moral superiority only so long as she remained there silently.” (Seymour-Smith 94)

“The tragedy of Tess Durbeyfield arises from her refusal to see herself not as a fallen woman, but as a pure woman, and from the refusal of angel Clare to recognize that she is indeed so.” (Maier 15) Perhaps the key question that gets at the heart of Hardy’s contribution to “the woman Question” is that which troubled (or enraged) some Victorian critics- how can Tess be characterizes as a “pure woman”? (Maier 17)

It must be remembered that women in Victorian society were not equal. The way Angel leaves Tess for her sin sounds exactly as Anne M. Mickelson remarks. She elaborates that “The values that Hardy builds into this novel and represents as Tess’s values are his indictment of woman as sexual object, of deceit as a necessary basis for marriage, and the concept that a woman who is not a virgin is damaged goods to be offered to the lowest bidder” (Mickelson 116).

Indeed, purity is a defining characteristic of female sexuality, but not for male. The sexual incites of men were thought of as causing remorse, but “natural,” while a woman who admitted to similar desires was considered “unnatural” an impure. Consequently, in fiction the sexually active or fallen woman is often portrayed as either the passive object of male desire, or as a femme fatale. (Maier 19)

“Victorian society exacerbates age-old harsh and hypocritical definitions of virtue and exhortations for maidens to conform” (Alexander 87). Tess is victimized by Victorian society, whose law, she is driven to break and from whose moral codes she is alienated. Tess’s behavior deviates from conventional Victorian norms, which regard her as an intruder into the society, and offender against the socially accepted moral standards, and conduct norms. Victorian male dominance as an accessory also plays an indispensable role in victimizing the protagonist. The male dominated world sacrifices Tess, for she violates the conventions which are in favor of male superiority and dominance over women. Rosemarie Morgan describes Tess’ rape being

“an act of theft, a dishonest appropriation of another’s property with the intent to deprive her of it permanently. The term suffices to denote the moral nature of the act, which passes beyond sexual assault to take account of violation of rightful ownership. It is a fitting emphasis in a novel that stresses a sexual ethic that denies woman the right to control not only her own mode of existence but also her own body.” (Morgan 94)

In such a severe society, Tess, a paganism-conformer, who is following the natural law, is destined to tragedy. Tess is designated as a “fallen” woman who is disdained and refused by the social community. Her deviation from the well accepted ethical restrictions for women decides her tragic destination. This is the inevitability of her tragedy. (Hazen 782).

To look at the story beyond the surface, and search the Victorian era when Thomas Hardy’s novel and poems initiate and form, it can be concluded that this is a novel that reflects the women, the religion, the ethics, the social life, and economics of the England during the Victorian era. Above all, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* is a novel that cannot be considered separately from the time period. This period is a transition from a cultural economy to the industrial era, and like any transitions, it has its own problems due to the great economic, social, and therefore cultural changes, which lead to some extends of uncertainties and flaws.

Tess initiates a tragic flaw at the beginning of the novel resulting from her parent’s pressures. This tragic flaw is indeed a character trait in a tragic heroine that brings about her downfall. Tess’s downfall is that critical moment when her father finds out that he is from a noble family; and her mother encourages her to go to that D’Urbervilles family to get help. It is the beginning point of Tess’s downfall, and other social and cultural disasters come after that.

Tess represents a country girl, who is ruined by social prejudice, and male dominance centered on the “double moral standard” of sexuality applied to men and women in the late nineteenth century. She is easily consumed by the evil power of the society. She is the victim of narrow- mindedness toward the concepts of chastity and virginity. She is also the sacrifice of male dominance in patriarchal Victorian society. To sum up, Linda Shires writes, “Tess of the d’Urbervilles is not only the richest novel that Hardy ever wrote, it is also the culmination of a long series of Victorian texts which identify, enact, and condemn the alienated condition of modernity” (Shires 159).

3. Conclusion

Tess’s tragedy is the archetype of women’s tragedies, which are involved in sexuality. Different societies

regulate different criteria of “accepted” women. The woman is culturally constructed, rather than biologically defined. Tess is the reflection of the society, and the representation of the women crushed at the bottom of society in a certain period of English history. Tess is forced to perish under the great social injustice towards marriage, and sexuality. Her tragedy is started by her father’s dream of family glory, and closely related with two men’s betrayals and two “falls”, which form the fabric of the story. Alec, and Angel are reincarnations of the destructive “double moral standard,” personifying the unjust moralities on women. They are the embodiment, and vehicle of combined social forces during the social transformation of England. They cooperate to destroy Tess as a “fallen” woman, a kept mistress, and a murderess, respectively by physical invasion, and spiritual oppression. Many critics observe that Tess is a novel, which challenges the existing social order—a defense of the “fallen” woman as a victim of social prejudice.

In Victorian Society, the progress of the moral success of an acceptable woman goes from virgin to conventionally married mother. Tess, as a girl mother, and obliged mistress, strays from the well-accepted way of her society. She is predestined to tragedy. It is the invisible pressures emanating from rigid social convention, and unfair ethic principles that shape her tragedy, and drive her to her end. Arnold Kettle argued that although “the subject of Tess of the d’Urbervilles is stated clearly by Hardy to be the fate of a ‘pure woman’; in fact it is the destruction of the English peasantry” (49). She is victimized by the combination of social prejudice, and male-dominance in patriarchal Victorian society. Tess’s story, to some extent, reflects the rigidity of convention, the harshness of social law and the prejudice of morality in male dominated patriarchal society. Tess deserves the reputation of “the best tragedy—the highest tragedy”, which is defined by the author. In the worldly view, Tess is a “fallen” woman; however, she is, essentially, pure, and naturally unstained. Tess is a pure woman as Hardy’s subtitle describes, although she is tragic.

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